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M.B.

A FEW FACTS

ILLUSTRATING

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THE

MANAGEMENT

OF THE

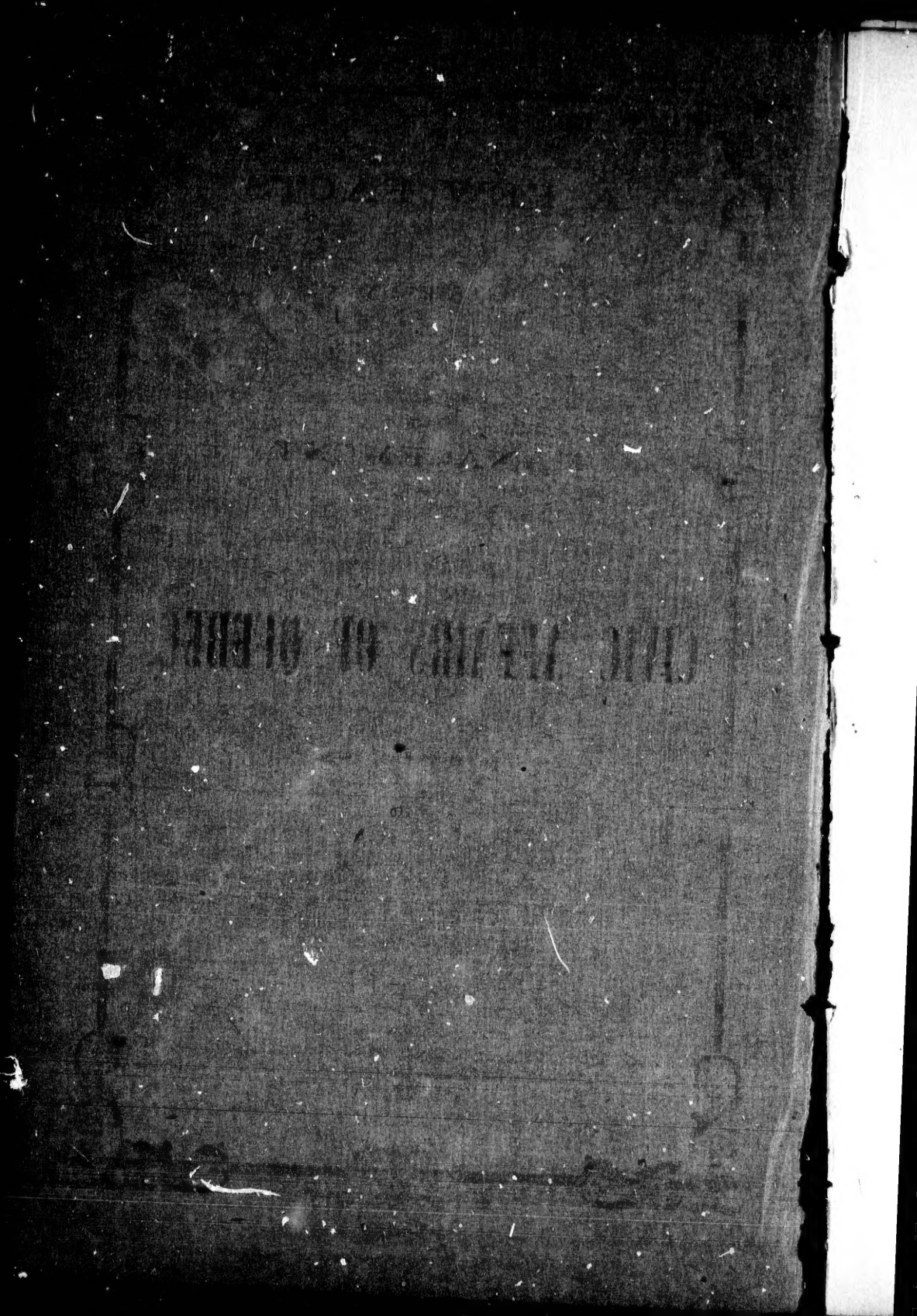
CIVIC AFFAIRS OF QUEBEC,

10TH MARCH, 1869.

QUEBEC:

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1869.



FACTUM.

ABOUT twelve months have elapsed since a number of citizens of Quebec presented a petition to the Legislature of this Province, setting forth that the prayer of the Corporation of Quebec, demanding at that time power to issue debentures and to impose fresh taxes upon the citizens, should not be granted; but, on the contrary, the administration of the civic affairs should be, for a certain period, taken from the Council, and vested in Commissioners.

Although the permission to issue new debentures for the purpose of covering a further deficit and of incurring additional expenditure was refused, the City Council, owing to the lateness of the Session, was not suspended.

That this Body should be replaced by Commissioners is the deeply felt conviction of the great majority of those who have property at stake in this City, whom the Corporation have been heavily mulcting since their last appearance before a Legislative Committee, and whom it is their openly avowed purpose to load with fresh imposts.

The administration of the Corporation has been so loose and so reckless, that they have repeatedly violated the City Charter. For instance, in 1859, having become completely involved, they obtained from the Legislature, by the Act of the 22nd Victoria, chapter 63, section 4, power to issue debentures to the amount of \$300,000, to enable them to consolidate their debt; but they were by the same Act prohibited from contracting new debts.

Notwithstanding this prohibition, the Corporation was again in a state of insolvency only six years later, in 1865, and had actually issued, *contrary to law*, debentures to the extent of \$54,696 for the purposes of the Corporation and \$16,880 for the Water Works. Application was again made to the Legislature, and authority was granted to them to issue new debentures to the extent of \$450,000, to cover the

floating debt and the amount of debentures illegally issued. On this occasion, by the Act 29 Victoria, chapter 57, section 37, the Legislature not only prohibited them from in any way increasing the amount of their debt, but made the Mayor and Councillors personally responsible for the same, and liable to be sued for misdemeanor if they sanctioned the expenditure of any sum of money beyond the amounts appropriated and the amount at their disposal.

Again, in 1867, we have the same history of embarrassment and of debt. From the statement furnished by the City Treasurer, on the 16th January, 1868, it appears that, notwithstanding the penalties imposed in 1865, the Corporation had contracted a further debt during the two years and four months ending 30th April, 1868, of \$145,662.07.

In fact, since the year 1859, it is notorious that the debt of the City has been steadily augmenting without any proportionate increase in the collection of revenue. The evil day has been invariably staved off by the issue of fresh debentures, and the citizens lulled into supineness and security by constant assurances (such as are not sparingly put forth even at this day) that all was prosperous and encouraging, until double taxes rudely awoke them to a sense of imminent danger, and until the credit of the City has been so deeply impaired, that within the last twelve months a small amount of debentures could not find a purchaser unless at a sacrifice of about ten per cent. discount, although yielding seven per cent. interest, and having only five years to run.

Is it therefore surprising that the signers of the petition should openly express their apprehension of the probable results of mismanagement of civic affairs during the next eight years, when no less than \$2,325,194 of debentures must be paid or otherwise provided for, of which \$809,021 mature in 1870; and this exclusive of a large amount for annual interest?

There is no doubt whatever, that, under *the present lax system*, the City of Quebec will be bankrupt in a year.

About the first of January last, the Mayor declared in public that he had a surplus of receipts over expenditure of \$62,632.17, and that this had happened for the first time for the last fifteen years. Such a declaration was of course

calculated to show in a very strong light the folly of those who stated last year, (and who still assert) that the management of city affairs should be withdrawn for a time from the present City Council, and that it should be entrusted to Commissioners, who could at the very worst only emulate their predecessors. This assertion was backed up by the declaration in public, at a meeting of the City Council, by one of its oldest members, that the citizens who had signed the petition above alluded to were signing away their rights, and that they declared themselves fools deserving of interdiction and incapable of acting as men; by lengthy newspaper articles and finally by the publication of a pamphlet in which it is broadly stated that our property and our fortunes are in the best possible keeping, and that the most disastrous consequences would result were the affairs of the City entrusted to Commissioners.

Having no other means of verifying the correctness of the Mayor's statement, we must look a little closely into the figures published or admitted by the Corporation.

The Assessment Roll for 1867-1868, as printed by the Corporation, on 16th January, 1868, gives as the amount of revenue to be collected, apart from Markets, Licenses, Palace Harbour, Sundries and Water Works revenue, Drainage Tax, and leaving out of the question the amount of \$18,386.34 to be levied through a business tax of 7½ per cent. (the legality of which was at first doubted, but now established), the sum of.....		\$177,773.60
Of which was really collected (as admitted in the published accounts of that fiscal year, at page 28).		107,979 86
Leaving still uncollected on 1st May, 1868....		\$69,793 74
Of these arrears there were collected during the first eight months of the fiscal year of 1868-1869, say to 31st December, 1868, only.....		14,870 71
Leaving uncollected.....		<u>\$54,923 03</u>

So that on the 31st December, 1868, there remained still outstanding arrears of the previous fiscal year not collected to the extent of \$54,923.03

By the Assessment Roll for the fiscal year
1868-1869 (which includes drainage and
business tax, the latter having been lega-
lised), the total amount to be collected by
the Corporation is..... \$219,486 32
Of this amount, all that they had collected at
the end of the first eight months, say on
31st December, 1868, was..... 100,555 50

The balance to be collected is therefore..... \$118,930 82

In the fiscal year of 1868-1869, a special tax
of 7½ per cent. was imposed, which was
to yield, at the lowest estimate, as by the
By-law of the sixth March, 1868..... \$69,000 00
Of this amount there has been collected during
the first eight months of this fiscal year not
more than 33,892 28

Leaving still to be collected..... \$35,107 72

From the foregoing figures, which can be corrected by
the Corporation, if wrong, it will be seen that the arrears
allowed to accumulate in 1867-1868 and 1868-1869 alone
(without reckoning those still due from previous fiscal
years, which cannot be ascertained except perhaps by the
Corporation and from other sources of revenue), are as fol-
lows on 31st December, 1868 :

1st. Arrears due from fiscal year 1867-1868... \$ 54,923 74
2nd. Arrears due to be collected before final
expiration of fiscal year 1868-1869..... 118,930 82
3rd. Arrears of special tax for last mentioned
period, as above stated..... 35,107 72
\$208,962 28

If the Water Works account for the first eight months of
the fiscal year 1868-1869, say as on 31st December, 1868,
were looked into, it would be found that the arrears of the
previous fiscal year (1867-1868) collected to that date
amount to \$37,762.61, (say \$35,253 51 arrears at 10c. and
\$2,509.10 for arrears of special rate of 3c.)

There are no data (known to citizens outside of the Corporation), whereby to ascertain the amount of the revenue which should be realised from water rates in the fiscal year of 1868-1869, it should range between \$70,000 and \$80,000, but let it be assumed at..... \$60,000 00

The amount collected of this sum being only—

Rates for 1868-1869..... \$13,326 16

Special rates for 1868-1869... 519 57

13,845 73

There remains still outstanding\$46,154 27

This last mentioned amount must be collected by 30th April, 1869. If, therefore, this sum of..... \$ 46,154 27

Be added to the above amount of..... 208,962 28

We have the sum of..... \$255,116 55

Two hundred and fifty-five thousand one hundred and sixteen dollars and fifty-five cents (!) for arrears of assessment and special tax uncollected on 31st December, 1868, for the fiscal years of 1867-1868 and 1868-1869—four months only remaining from that date to first of May next, when they should be collected. How much of that sum has been got in, how much is lost, and how much will remain over as arrears on 1st May next, it is not easy to tell, but it would appear that this examination into the mode of collection of revenue is not without its use in showing how the ever recurring periodical deficits of the Corporation are to be accounted for. It will also explain why special taxes are resorted to, and why an income tax is threatened. There are some citizens who can be reached without much trouble, no time is lost in collecting the ordinary taxes from them; with regard to others, they are allowed to fall into arrears, either because the collection of money from them is more difficult, or because (as is perhaps unjustly surmised) they are members of the Corporation or influential in working for them at the civic elections; in some quarters, however, collections have been so vigorous, that summonses have been frequently served on citizens who had already paid their dues, and this even since the signing of the petition. The result of this system has been that when a deficiency of revenue was thus created, the fact was not (as it is now) brought home to the tax-payers by fresh imposts. (Would that it had been so ten years ago, by the refusal of the Legis-

lature of that period to sanction the mismanagement of the Corporation, by allowing a fresh issue of debentures.) It was reserved to the Legislature of Quebec to inaugurate a wholesome repression, which will culminate, it is humbly suggested, in a complete renovation of the whole system by the temporary substitution of three Commissioners. The panacea of debentures having been checked by the Legislature last year, money was wanted to satisfy immediate and urgent demands. A special tax was the only remedy, and it was imposed; but how was it collected? exactly as all previous taxes had been got in—all those who had once honestly paid were compelled to pay again, and those who had not paid their ordinary assessments were neither forced to pay up those arrears nor to pay their share of the special tax. The taxes not coming in fast enough, and the arrears rapidly increasing, the right to impose the most hateful, oppressive and inquisitorial of taxes, *an income tax*, was unhesitatingly clamored for by the Corporation. To this clamor the signers of the Petition have no fear that the Legislature will yield, particularly as it is known that in the imposition of the income tax precisely those individuals will be exempted, who are always in arrears of all taxes, as it is the determination of the Corporation [at least such is the current rumour], that all incomes under a certain amount shall be free from tax. Such a measure might not be so injurious were those citizens declared disqualified from voting for the election of men who pretend to manage the affairs of the *bonâ fide* proprietors and rate payers.

One word as to income taxes. Our properties, our liberties and our lives are under the protection of the Legislature of the country. When these are imperilled Government has an undoubted right to impose an income tax, for all are exposed to danger in exact proportion to their stake in the country, no matter in what City or District of it their property may be situated; but, to take a familiar instance, when a citizen happens to own in this City, property yielding a revenue of \$400 per annum, and other property in Toronto, Montreal, Three Rivers, perhaps in more than one of those Cities, which yields in the aggregate a further income of \$600, it is preposterous to maintain that the City improvements which benefit his property here, or the City extravagance which entails taxes of all kinds upon it here, should entitle this Corporation to dive into his pocket and extract therefrom an integral portion of means derived from

property already taxed elsewhere. But such a proposal need astonish no one who learns from what quarter it proceeds.

Is it not however singular, to say the least of it, that with arrears of uncollected taxes amounting to \$255,116.55, this Corporation should not pause before making application to tax the citizens in the most odious manner that can be devised? *Are they even legally justified in imposing special taxes, while there remain an immense amount of uncollected taxes?*

This year they have imposed a special tax of 7½ cents in the dollar, they have been allowed to collect the water rates three months in advance, they have availed themselves of the enactment which cut off all appeal against decisions of the Recorder, and yet the uncollected arrears, apart from arrears from markets and other sources, have frightfully increased.

The last sentence of the inaugural address of the Mayor on assuming office on the 13th January, 1868, was as follows:

"I consider that with strict economy and the employment of such proper measures to levy the taxes fairly as the law gives us, and with the strict collection of our debts—
"an imperative duty—we have ample means to meet our
"current expenses."

These words embodied without doubt, the true intentions of the Mayor, but have these promises been realised? **THEY HAVE NOT NOR CAN THEY BE WITH THE PRESENT COUNCIL,** (although good and well meaning men may be found there) A tree is known by its fruits—a system by its results, and what are the fruits and the results of their management even under the superintendence of one who gives expression to statements such as are quoted above?

The Corporation, or rather the Council, is nominally composed of 8 Aldermen and 16 Councillors, a goodly array of advisers, but it is a notorious fact that very few of these really know anything of the affairs of the City, beyond the information vouchsafed to them by the four or five who assume the perpetual management and control of all the committees. It is from the latter that proceeds the cry that the citizens will lose their franchise should they be

relieved from their civic duties. That the appointment of Commissioners would be a commission of Bankruptcy, &c.

As civic elections are now managed, and as they will continue to be controlled until Commissioners have swept away the whole net work of intrigue, no citizen dare approach the Polls to support a candidate hostile to the present system. Men will certainly press forward to the Polls when their liberty or their religion is at stake, but when the question is a mere choice between a loss of a certain sum of money and the fracture of a limb, the decision is soon made.

If four or five of the Council pretend that they can conduct the affairs of the City, devoting only portions of their time to the work, why should not three men devoting their undivided attention to the business of the Corporation meet with success at least equal to theirs—a greater failure cannot surely await them.

The City of Quebec is the capital of the Province of Quebec, and the ancient capital of the country; within its venerable walls are assembled the Delegates from every county—the able and the true of the Province of Quebec. When a Petition numerously signed by our most influential citizens, is presented to them to approve of the appointment of Commissioners to retrieve our affairs, is it to be supposed that these Delegates are less inclined to protect the franchises of their fellow citizens, than the few individuals who govern the Corporation of this City? Is the suspension of the Council, and the substitution for a very few years of Commissioners named by the Lieutenant-Governor, an infliction so greatly to be dreaded? It may be dreaded, it is true, but not by the tax payers who have been shorn long enough and who desire equal rights and equal sacrifices—neither fear, favor, nor affection—no pillaging by bailiffs, dishonest clerks or collectors of the city revenues whether of markets, wharves or other city property—in one word, a revolution in the whole corporate system.

The Petition is silent on the subject of expenditure—one great grievance must be remedied at a time, that is the non collection of revenue and the heaping on of tax upon tax—the present Corporation have been for years on their trial—the result is known.

The nomination of the Commissioners by the Lieutenant-Governor, would not be an exercise of a function foreign to his high office, and his deep personal interest in real estate in this City, would be an additional guarantee of a judicious selection of Commissioners regardless of political considerations. The law has already appointed him to be the conservator of civic affairs, and *ex officio*, he can prevent the continuance in force of any by-law if he signify his pleasure within ninety days from its adoption by the Council, [see 29 Victoria, chapter 57, section 30, No. 5.]

Not only will the three Commissioners be liable at any moment to render an account to the Lieutenant-Governor, should he think fit to order an enquiry into their conduct at the request of the citizens, but they will have to publish periodical statements, to encounter the strict scrutiny of those whom we trust that they will replace, and the not less searching comments and enquiries of the Press, now thoroughly alive to the critical state of civic affairs.

The signers of the Petition, although stigmatised as fools by the Council, do not desire to attack the character of any individual composing it. It is the system which they denounce as utterly valueless and worse than useless, and which they have a right to petition the Legislature to break up through the temporary appointment of three Commissioners to carry on the business of the Corporation, or, to speak more clearly, an effective Council of three instead of a useless and dangerous incumbrance of twenty-five.

Time was when the Council might again and again beg for a fresh trial of their skill in taxing, financiering and spending of the City funds. After every disgraceful breakdown and direct violation of the law, the Council have applied to the Legislature for amnesty for the past and new powers for the future, and never failed to plunge the City still more deeply into debt.

Now, the immense majority of those who really pay the taxes respectfully but firmly pray the Legislature that this Council be at once suspended, so that what remains of their property be saved, not from reasonable taxation, but from grinding and vexatious imposts or insolvency.

The Corporation pamphlet declares that all Commissioners have been failures. The reply is simple—had any of

these Commissioners have fallen under the control of the City Council, the failure would have been ten-fold worse for, unlike the Corporation, all Commissioners heretofore existing have never neglected to collect their revenue, however they may have erred in their investments. The Corporation of Quebec are helpless to collect theirs—hence this petition.

The citizens of Quebec who have signed the Petition above referred to are persuaded that in applying to the Legislature for the appointment of Commissioners to replace the present City Council, they have adopted a course which is fully justified by the imminent danger of civic bankruptcy; by the reckless disregard and contempt of all Legislative enactments shown for years by the Council; by their utter incapacity or persistent and ruinous neglect to collect the revenue of the City; by their continually recurring applications to Parliament for additional powers of taxation; by the evidences of gross departmental mismanagement, which are periodically coming to light; and, finally, by the absolute necessity of confiding the management and control of civic affairs, for a few years, to the undivided attention of men not only of integrity, but of financial ability, prudence and experience, and three men of such a character they believe it possible to find in this City.

Quebec, 10th March, 1869.

MATURITY OF DEBENTURES.

	1868.	1869.	1870.	1871.	1872.	1873.	1874.	1875.	1876.
Old issue.....	\$ 2,000	\$ 1,300	\$ 36,800	\$	\$ 54,100	\$ 132,300	\$ 70,800	\$ 69,200	\$ 2,000
Do. payable in London.....						194,664			243,328
Special Debentures.....		1,000							
St. John's Gate Debentures.....			310,781	36,300	15,600				
New issue.....									
Fire Alarm Debentures.....			46,800	6,000	6,000	14,953		3,000	
Water Works Debentures.....			414,640			194,664		92,000	107,064
Do. payable in London.....									
Total.....	\$2,000	\$2,300	\$809,021	\$42,300	\$75,700	\$536,581	\$70,800	\$364,200	\$352,392

	1877.	1878.	1879.	1880.	1881.	1882.	1883.	1884.	1885.
Old issue.....	\$	\$	\$ 10,200	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$	\$
Do. payable in London.....	29,200	9,733	289,020	1,200					
Special Debentures.....		5,200	3,100			1,372	3,012	1,000	500
St. John's Gate Debentures.....									20,600
New issue.....	10,000								
Fire Alarm Debentures.....	27,000								
Water Works Debentures.....	8,000								
Do. payable in London.....									
Total.....	\$74,200	\$14,933	\$222,320	\$1,200		\$1,372	\$3,012	\$1,000	\$21,100

Add -Bills payable, \$98,348, and one Debenture out of \$400.